What Every Educator Should Teach to Their Learners to Confront the 21st Century Life and Career?

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Abstract

In the context of 21st-century education development, educators are increasingly designing instructional methods aimed at equipping students with essential competencies to meet the unique demands of this era. Core skills such as expert thinking, effective communication, exploratory collaboration, and creative learning activities are fundamental for navigating the complexities of modern life and the global workforce. However, these competencies alone are insufficient for future readiness. This article argues that deeper cognitive and socio-cultural stimulation is necessary for students' success in the 21st century. Drawing from relevant literature, this study proposes that educators should emphasize three interrelated capabilities: strengthening philosophical literacy as a foundational skill; enhancing the ability to comprehend and respond to social environments; and cultivating cross-cultural understanding. Furthermore, this article recommends a structured pedagogical approach that includes brainstorming activities, fostering life wisdom, and promoting intercultural information exchange among students. These strategies are expected to better prepare learners for global educational and professional challenges in the 21st century.

Abstrak

Dalam konteks perkembangan pendidikan abad ke-21, para pendidik semakin banyak merancang metode pengajaran yang bertujuan untuk membekali peserta didik dengan kompetensi esensial guna menghadapi tuntutan khas era ini. Keterampilan inti seperti berpikir ahli, komunikasi efektif, kolaborasi eksploratif, dan aktivitas pembelajaran kreatif merupakan hal mendasar untuk menghadapi kompleksitas kehidupan modern dan dunia kerja global. Namun, kompetensi tersebut belum cukup untuk mempersiapkan peserta didik menghadapi masa depan secara utuh. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa stimulasi kognitif dan sosial-budaya yang lebih mendalam diperlukan demi keberhasilan peserta didik di abad ke-21. Berdasarkan tinjauan literatur yang relevan, studi ini mengusulkan agar para pendidik menekankan tiga kemampuan yang saling terkait yang meliputi : penguatan literasi filsafat sebagai keterampilan dasar; peningkatan kemampuan memahami dan merespons lingkungan sosial; dan pengembangan pemahaman lintas budaya. Selain itu, artikel ini merekomendasikan pendekatan pedagogis yang terstruktur, mencakup kegiatan *brainstorming,* penanaman kebijaksanaan hidup, serta pertukaran informasi antar peserta didik lintas budaya. Strategi-strategi ini diharapkan dapat mempersiapkan peserta didik dengan lebih baik dalam menghadapi tantangan pendidikan dan profesional secara global di abad ke-21.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the development of teaching methods has inevitably shifted from traditional approaches to more modern, learner-centered paradigms. These changes can be observed from the pre-method to the post-method era, where each stage reflects different teaching philosophies and styles used to deliver core content to learners (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). As we enter the 21st century, the demand for equipping learners with essential life and career skills has grown more urgent. The "Four Cs" critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity have been widely recognized as indispensable for students in navigating the complex challenges of the modern world (National Education Association [NEA], 2012).

Studies have shown that these 21st-century competencies not only improve students' academic performance but also prepare them to be adaptable and innovative members of society (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Saavedra & Opfer, 2012). However, despite widespread acknowledgment of the importance of these skills, the implementation in classroom practices often remains superficial and inconsistent (Voogt & Roblin, 2012). Learners frequently struggle to apply these competencies meaningfully without structured support and guided learning strategies (Fullan & Scott, 2014). In this context, educators play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between traditional content delivery and the holistic development of learners.

To support learners in mastering these skills, educators must adopt rigorous strategies and act as facilitators who provide comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985) and create learning environments that are both student-centered and inquiry driven. In addition to the "Four Cs," students also need to be equipped with global awareness, cross-cultural competence, and an understanding of core disciplines such as science and mathematics to truly thrive in 21st-century contexts (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009; OECD, 2018).

Moreover, as highlighted by Dede (2010), the knowledge economy increasingly demands "meta-cognitive" abilities such as self-direction, adaptability, and the ability to learn how to learn. Educators must, therefore, bridge the gap between traditional content delivery and the holistic development of learners by integrating educational philosophy, global citizenship, and sustainability literacy into classroom instruction. These competencies are essential not only for academic success but also for cultivating individuals who are equipped to navigate future uncertainties in both the workplace and broader society (Redecker et al., 2011). Furthermore, research by Binkley et al. (2012) and Saavedra & Opfer (2012) highlights the need to integrate higher order thinking skills with real-world contexts, including intercultural understanding, global awareness, and sustainability literacy.

However, many education systems remain narrowly focused on cognitive achievements such as memorization and standardized test performance, often neglecting the affective, social, and ethical dimensions of learning (Biesta, 2010). To address this gap, there is a growing need to shift from traditional, teacher-centered approaches to more humanistic, reflective, and contextually grounded pedagogies. In this regard, integrating educational philosophy into the curriculum provides a foundation for critical and ethical thinking; fostering global citizenship nurtures a sense of social responsibility; and promoting sustainability literacy empowers learners to contribute meaningfully to the future of the planet and humanity (UNESCO, 2017).

With this hindsight, the author proposes that educators should teach learners not only the "Four Cs" but also three essential skill areas: (1) critical educational philosophy and reflective thinking, (2) cross-cultural competence, and (3) environmental and global awareness. These areas are vital to stimulate learners to engage meaningfully with the global community. This article seeks

to explore how the implementation of these three core competencies affects learners' future life and career readiness and offers practical designs for educators to deliver comprehensible input in an effective, future-oriented manner.

METHOD

This study employed a literature review (library research) method to examine the essential 21st-century skills that should be taught by educators to prepare learners for future life and career demands. The review focused on three key competencies: (1) understanding of educational philosophy, (2) cross-cultural awareness, and (3) social and environmental consciousness.

The steps in conducting the literature review were as follows:

1. Topic Formulation and Focus Determination The initial step involved defining the central focus of the study, which is to identify and synthesize scholarly perspectives on the essential skills required for 21st-century learners, particularly beyond the commonly emphasized "Four Cs" (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity).

2. Source Identification and Selection Criteria Relevant literature was gathered from peer-reviewed journals, academic books, official reports (e.g., OECD, UNESCO), and educational frameworks (e.g., P21 Framework). The inclusion criteria were: a) Published between 2010 and 2024. b) Written in English or Indonesian. c) Directly related to 21st-century education, global competencies, or curriculum development.

3. Database Exploration and Keyword Use. Literature was accessed using databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, and ResearchGate. The keywords included: "21st century skills," "global competencies," "education and cross-cultural skills," "educational philosophy," "social responsibility in education," "future-ready curriculum," and "literature review in education."

4. Review, Coding, and Categorization. The selected sources were critically read, annotated, and coded thematically to identify recurring themes and frameworks. The findings were then grouped into three categories: a) Philosophical foundations of education, b) Cross-cultural and global competence. c) Socio-environmental awareness and sustainability education

5. Content Analysis and Synthesis. Through qualitative content analysis, the researcher synthesized key insights from various scholars and institutions, noting similarities, differences, and emerging trends in how these skills are conceptualized and recommended for teaching in 21st-century contexts.

6. Interpretation and Framework Proposal. Finally, the reviewed literature was interpreted to propose a conceptual framework highlighting what educators should teach to equip learners with the necessary competencies for life and work in a rapidly changing world.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Education is involved in many fields which interpenetrate each other and of course gives significance to each other. This field covers a wide and multi-dimensional spectrum. The role of the individual learners is able to give and make use of what have they learned in some sequences. The education itself in the future has some prospects, even in a decade or in the next generation, cannot be foreseen in terms of precise predictions. One can however see many kinds of trends of teachings and methods in the domains which will not only set the future direction of education. Therefore, many experts concerning this condition try to establish the better challenges of improving the skills for the learners to peer this changing world.

Educators should be ready to prepare their learners to face the new challenge. They need to understand the best empirical evidence on what sort of skills that must be and suitable for their learners to get succeed in career and personal life. However, there must be a good cooperation between the state and district leaders to dig deeper the needs of the educators that can be in the forms of clear communication and make concrete ways that make sense the classroom teachers who finally will be responsible to teach their learners (Jerald, 2009, p. 1)

Further, in the era of twenty first century, not only the educators but also the learners have to be active to handle many various skills which are provided by many inventors in the form of 21st century framework (Fadel, 2008, p. 13-17):

Table 1. 21st Century framework

Core Subjects	21st Century Themes	Learning & Innovation Skills	Information, Media & Technology Skills	Life & Career
Native Language	Global Awareness	Critical Thinking & Problem Solving	Information Literacy	Flexibility & Adaptability
World Language	Financial	Creativity & Innovation	Media Literacy	Initiative & Self Direction
Art	Entrepreneurial Literacy	Communication & Collaboration	ICT (Information, Communication & Technology) Literacy	Social & Cross Cultural Skills
Geography	Civic Literacy			Productivity & Accountability
History	Health Literacy			Leadership & Responsibility
Mathematic Science & Civic	Economic Business			

Framework of Partnership of 21st Century Skills. Adapted from Charles Fadel Global Lead, Education Cisco System, Inc. 21stCentury Skills: how can you prepare students for the new global economy, OECD/CERI, Paris, May 2008.

The very important skills for now to be mastered by the learners are the four skills namely critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. It is because those skills are much more needed to do the learning process. However, these skills are not enough for the learners to confront the real life for their future. It is thus the educators should do another stimulus and make them ready to scrutinize the interaction with the world community in the forms of strengthening the knowledge of educational background of philosophy, comprehending the ability of social environment understanding, and deepening the leverages of combining the cross-culture's skills. Moreover, the brainstorming activities, encouraging the passion of their wisdom of life and conducting the exchange-sharing information with other learners will be the appropriate approach for them to acquire the demand skills.

Over the past years, there had been found many different educational philosophies which had been also developed by some experts. They try to facilitate the educators to have a better way

of teaching to make them teach their learners effectively. The following is a list of educational philosophies and their basic ideas (Ganly, 2012, p. 6-7):

1. Perennialism is a teacher-centered philosophy. It focuses on the values continues with the reason. It then considers the knowledge exists for a long time, tries to find the everlasting truths, and looks the principles of existence as constant.
2. Positivism is a teacher-centered philosophy. This philosophy rejects an intuition, problems of mind, importance, and inner causes. Further, it also bases truth on provable fact. Besides, this philosophy relies on the situation and motion as valid, and it is also known as a logical positivism.
3. Behaviorism is a teacher-centered philosophy. It is almost related to realism. This philosophy also concentrates on human behavior as a reaction to external stimuli and believes that changing the environment can change misbehavior.
4. Essentialism is a teacher-centered philosophy. This philosophy believes that there is a common set of knowledge and skills which educated people should have. It more focuses on the respectation of the authority, developing habits of the mind, and giving some training in fundamentals. It is like perennialism.
5. Humanism is a student-centered philosophy. It focuses on improving someone's innate goodness, and refuses the ideas of group-oriented education, and upholds the ideas of improving individual development. Moreover, this philosophy suggests that the learners should be involved with their education on all levels, and they have to choose what should be learned by them.
6. Constructivism is a student-centered philosophy. It focuses on the emphasizing hands-on learning and learners' participation in lessons. It believes that leaners are able to discover lesson on their own through hands activity.
7. Reconstructionism is a student-centered philosophy. It more focuses on the promoting the social progress that concerns with the world events, issues, and developing a vision for a new better world.
8. Progressivism is a student-centered philosophy. It believes that the ideas should be tested by doing the experiment, finding some answers due to the questions. This philosophy results the scientific method of teaching and allows the individuals to have their own beliefs.

Even though, those kinds of philosophies are different in many ways they all still focus on teaching the learners effectively. These philosophies are very useful both to the educators as facilitators and the learners themselves as the target of this sort of learning process.

The understanding of social environment for human is very important. The human itself implicates the immediate physical surroundings, social relationship, and cultural milieus within that defined groups of people purposes and interact. The elements of the social environment include built infrastructure, industrial and occupational structure, labor markets, social and economic processes, wealth, social, human, and health services, power relations, government, race relations, social inequality, and cultural practices; the arts, religious institutions and practices, and believes about place and community (Barnett and Casper, 2001, 469).

Further, the social environment has many aspects of the physical environment such as the given that contemporary landscapes, water resources, and other natural resources which have been at least configured by the human social process. While the contemporary social environments are solely the historical social and power relations that have happened over time. The social

environments can be gained through experiences at many different scales, including the households, kin networks, neighborhoods, towns and cities, and regions. They are dynamic and always change continually as the results of both internal and external focuses due to the relationship among the social environments and the other local areas.

The official definition of culture is the inherited values, concepts, and ways of living that has been spread by people to the same social groups. Then, it will be divided by two kinds to make it understandable; the first is the generic culture which is a shared culture done by all human livings on this planet. The second is local culture that refers to symbols and schemes which is shared by a particular social group (Kawar, 2012). And as we know nowadays that the cross-cultural skills are very urgent to have as to understand other cultures must need some ways. For example, the technological achievements have brought people closer together. It means that most of them are very easy to do the communication, social activities, interactions, and so forth. This also means that they must come from different parts of the world and have the variety cultural backgrounds that likely do the working and communicating together.

Communication is kind of culture that must be considered in the context or through the lens of participant's cultures. Then, the style of this communication is somehow influenced by our families or childhood experiences as we learn to speak and share the nonverbal messages to explain our thoughts and needs to others. Moreover, we try to begin interacting with the people around the world to learn other cultures and create the better relationships. Thus, the skill of communication will bring us to the bright future in our lives.

What should the educators teach before teaching their learners?

The role of the educators in the era of 21st century life is not easy as they have to master first all the "Four Cs" skills that have been suggested by many experts in that filed. The educators should understand what the learners need to have to confront the special demand of the 21st century life and career. Their future careers are solely depend on what their educators give to them because the role of their educators will influences their perspective to follow this era. Unless, the learners will have some problems with their future career. The stimulus concerning to this issue must be conveyed. There are three main points that the educators must master them and teach them to their learners:

The first, as the educators, they need to stimulate their learners with the skill of educational background of philosophy. It is because it has the important aspect of their life. They have to deal with the condition of such implications from their learning process to help the learners attain their best future career through ideas, experiences, and developments. Many think that educational philosophy is the most important aspect of teacher training. While, others claim that it has been taken out from classroom practice that it is a waste of time. The philosophy of education is again very important because it demonstrates how educational theories arise (Jordan, 2008). The second role of educators is that they have to give the concept of social environment understanding to their learners in order to make them attain easily long with their upcoming environment for their future career. Learning is a very social event for most educators and learners. There are seven aspects concerning with the social events (Elliot, 1990, p. 3):

1. Learners study many behaviors from observing other learners.
2. Learners can teach each other important skills.
3. Learning is improved when chances to respond are increased.
4. Learning is improved when time-on-task is increased.

5. Learning is improved when feedback about effort and products is provided in on time manner.
6. Learning is improved when reinforcement is provided.
7. Academic performance and classroom behavior are highly interrelated.

Those kinds of aspects must be applied and delivered by the educators to their learners properly and correctly. The learners need to know more in depth about them. Further, the social skills, problem behaviors, and academic functioning are really interrelated. . It is thus the primer act of their educators is that the educators responsible with them as the main purpose of these skills is solely to make the learners can interact effectively with others and to avoid the negative social interactions with others. There are many categories of social skills; communication, cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, engagement, and self-control (Elliot, 1990, p. 6). These seven categories are somewhat easy to do in the classroom practice. And there some variables that influences social skills namely the lack of opportunities, problem behaviors, lack of knowledge, lack of practice, lack of reinforcement. These variables will be deficient in having social skills functioning which make the maladjusted outcomes. So, the educators must be able to handle these in order to cover the weakness of their learners.

The last role of the educators to do before teaching their learners is to comprehend the cross-cultural skills. The learners must understand these useful skills because they will face the better understanding of many cultures around the world and can create the best relationship with other communities outside their local cultures. In addition, they also can make a good social networking through cross-cultural communication. By its very basic meaning, the latter is giving and receiving any thoughts and ideas by delivering the verbal and nonverbal ways that has the results are able to create and cultivate relationships with individuals from many different cultures of backgrounds.

However, at this point, the educators must still consider and recognize the distinction between cross-cultural and intercultural communication. Many researchers argue that comprehending cross-cultural communication is very essential skill that precedes understanding intercultural communication. While the cross-cultural communication skill has been defined as the competency of having communication between people from differing cultural backgrounds. Then, the skills must be developed such as the language, verbal and nonverbal communication across cultures and understanding the influential variables on the expression and perception of identity, and group communication as well as communication in cross- or intercultural relationship, and last be aware of the unknown cultures.

To increase these skills, it is better to be aware of the below similarities and differences in perception of (Anonym, 2017, p. 2):
1. Formality of speech and language (e.g., choose correct tense and reference, not to use the slang language)
2. Etiquette, rules, or manner (e.g., what is considered polite)
3. Body language (e.g., how to sit and stand may have alternate meaning)
4. Verbal and nonverbal cues (e.g., direct speech, implied meaning, signs, or symbols)
5. Personal or physical space (e.g., comfort zone)
6. Social values and customs (e.g., what are the norms, of conduct, be aware of how sex or religion can inform behaviors)
7. Concept of time (e.g., what is considered "late" may differ)

8. Humor (e.g., what you find funny may strike another as rude or offensive)
9. Privacy (e.g., asking personal questions can be impolite)

Those tips must be informed by the educators in making the better learners to confront many views of understanding of different cultures. Thus, the learned skills regarding to the cross-cultural understanding must be really comprehensible inputs that will be gained by the learners.

The frameworks of teaching learning process

To do the teaching learning process in the era of 21st century is very challenging as there so many ways of teaching. The following framework will be the newest and the most reference one to be followed (Chu et al, 2017, p. 20).

Figure 1. Twenty First Century Skills Framework
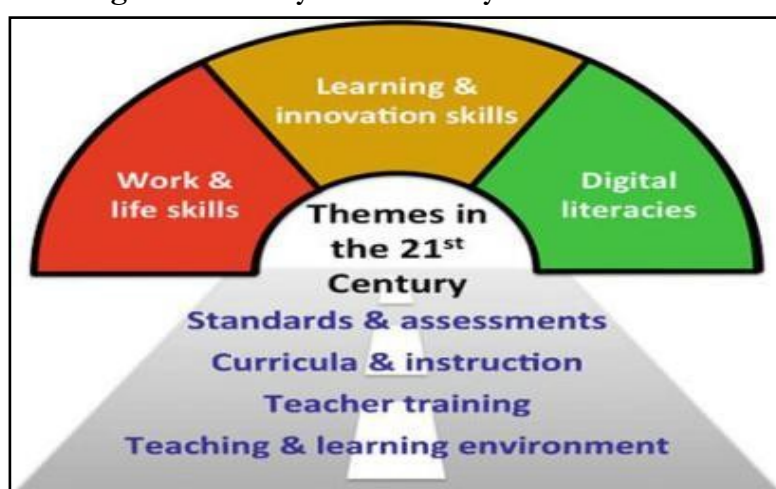
This American organization has been established in 2002. It is formed by many backgrounds of people. They are business leaders, consultants, and educators. They made a concept of a framework for twenty-first century skills. This framework has been famous in the field of information technology (IT) in education. It consists of eleven competencies that are classified into three elements including (1) learning and innovation skills, (2) information, media and technology skills, and (3) life and career skills. This is also followed by a support system which embodies standards, assessments, curriculum, instructions, professional development, and learning environments. Despite this, the educators should again first do the variation in their learning process of teaching. They may use the former framework to do in the classroom. Yet, they need to do the variation specifically to train their learners to confront the needs of the 21st century education worldwide in the set of frameworks which consists of brainstorming activities, encouraging the passion of their wisdom of life and conducting the exchange-sharing information with other learners. In short, this training will be very useful for not only the educators but the learners as well to create the good atmosphere of teaching learning process.

CONCLUSION

In response to the demands of the 21st century, teaching and learning methods have undergone continuous innovation to meet the evolving needs of learners. Educators play a central role in

facilitating these changes, not only by adapting to new pedagogical approaches but also by equipping themselves with the competencies necessary for effective instruction. In conclusion, to truly prepare learners for 21st-century life and careers, educators must integrate both essential skill sets and meaningful teaching approaches. These dual elements essential skills and transformative learning strategies should become the cornerstone of modern education aimed at producing future-ready individuals.

This study has emphasized the importance of three additional essential competencies: (1) a deep understanding of educational philosophy, (2) socio-environmental awareness, and (3) cross-cultural competence. These competencies are critical in nurturing learners who are not only academically capable but also socially responsible, open-minded, and globally aware. Therefore, educators must act as facilitators who stimulate these skills through purposeful strategies, such as brainstorming activities, encouraging life-long learning motivation, and promoting information exchange and dialogue within the classroom. These instructional approaches can help create an environment that fosters not only academic achievement but also personal and civic growth.

The limitation of studies, since it is based on a literature review, the findings rely solely on secondary data and interpretations of existing theories and publications. There is no empirical evidence or direct classroom observation to validate the practical implementation of the proposed competencies and strategies. Furthermore, the scope of this study may be limited by the availability and accessibility of recent and regionally relevant sources. Future research may benefit from conducting empirical studies, classroom-based interventions, or action research to explore how these skills are implemented and developed in real educational settings.

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